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MANUAL LABOR AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF NATIONAL IDEALS

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We are emerging from our first conquest: we have conquered the lands. Farms stretch from coast to coast so that desert and forest push back to the corners of the continent. Our second conquest will be of machines. Already the wheels of industry turn almost of themselves while unlimited power from the turbines streams over wires to distant cities. So great have been our conquests, so many are the powers harnessed to industrial life that the casual onlooker may be brought to conclude industrial labor has been abolished by the accumulated knowledge and surplus property laid up for us by generations of the past and present. The man who lives in cities is likely to travel little and to see little because his routine by its security and monotony starves out all adventurous instinct. So the city man, traveling between his home and the office or store, complacently dwells upon this as the age of the mind and of machines. He charms himself into the belief that the time is here when man will no longer earn his living by the sweat of his brow but rather will sit in Jovian contemplation of a perfected mechanism which will turn the wheels of agriculture, of commerce, of manufacture and of trade.

THE MASSES LIVE BY COMMON TOIL

The truth is that the world still labors by muscle not by mind. The farmer tills his lands from early morning till late at evening, trudging home at sunset wet with sweat. The miner astride his quivering drill knocks down his tons of ore and gasping comes up from his shift to change sodden clothes for dry. The mill worker and mechanic with flying hands and fingers beat through the day and at night go out the gates tired of muscle and of brain. It would be well if those street-car and subway philosophers who derive their image of America from across desk tops and the penny papers could make a tour of adventure and of exploration to the mills of their town, the farms that lie about it and the mines in the

nearby hills. They would there find that manual labor is the means by which America lives and that men not machines are still the contact points with nature. And it is well that it is so. A new and terrible degeneracy would no doubt creep in when the world sat down to watch nature do its work. For man, mechanics is only an assistant, not a substitute. Manual labor must remain the heritage of the masses, their birthright to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow.

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MANUAL LABOR WELL DONE

Education must emphasize the need of manual labor and the desirability of doing that labor so well that it will produce abundantly for the needs of the individual and society. In the last century of America formal education has become universal but it still clings to the ideals of the fortunate few to whom it was originally restricted; those members of the non-laboring class who were to do the planning, not the working, for the race. Education must aim at the heart of the problem by teaching that manual labor is necessary and therefore honorable and that education is a means whereby manual labor becomes more effective. Educators have long embraced the theory that the province of education is to deal with higher things than mere labor; that labor must come soon enough for the masses of children; and that, therefore, the brief time in schools must be made a vacation period for the hands while the brain takes its short and final exercise from whence, perforce, it must come to rest when school days end and work begins. It seemed to them imperative that the children of the masses should participate for a time in that realm of thought and of scholasticism to which they will probably never have an opportunity to return. As a result some complained that schools were incompetent, that they had no relation to real life and that educators were theorists and dreamers. Meanwhile there sprung up a host of office boys, clerks, odd-job men, hangers-on and others who had come through the school system to find the world a place wherein they were required to do something for a living and to do it by hand as well as by brain.

OCCUPATIONAL ELEMENTS IN THE CURRICULUM

Only lately have persons grudgingly admitted that schools should have some relation to occupation; that schools should be the training ground for work as well as for thought; and that manual

labor on farms, in mines, in mills and shops must be the heritage of the many who attend the public schools. In response to the demand for this occupational work, courses in manual training, home economics and agriculture have crept into the school systems and some persons are bold enough to term these courses "vocational." In truth few of them are yet really vocational because they do not train for a vocation. Rather do they seem to give to the student a very limited amount of manual dexterity and thought familiarity in these subjects. Manual training courses in the school do not train mechanics, home economics courses do not train housekeepers, nor do agricultural courses train farmers. Much manual training still putters with tiny tables and jig-saw work. Many home economics courses peter out in sticky candies badly made and impossible aprons poorly sewn. Most agricultural courses specialize in tiny gardens and never get out to the fields and farms.

Some of the best vocational and industrial teaching in America was the earliest. When General Armstrong created the first real industrial school in America at Hampton in 1868 and thereby cut the Gordian knot of education, he established a school which was truly vocational in that he trained men and women for daily work and turned out therefrom a finished product. From uneducated labor Hampton makes farmers, bricklayers, carpenters and mechanics. Hampton is a vocational school. Such schools are only possible, however, where they are regarded as the essential form of education by those who are to be educated and by those who have the schools in charge. For real vocational education in manual pursuits there is not yet wide demand from the common folk or from the educators. Both the people and the pedagogues have received their education in schools of the old academic type; they are therefore likely to regard the old type which trained away from labor as the only real education. Many schools have been founded upon the fond dream that they were to train for life's elemental occupations only to find their trend changed by the men who had their direction or by the people among whom they were to work.

TRADITION AND PEDANTRY IN EDUCATION

The truth is that the mass of persons whom manual schools would benefit do not want such schools. They still desire to have their children study in the direction which to them means learning.

Schools for the manual vocations, they believe, may be desirable for negroes and Indians and perhaps for the people in the next town or even possibly for their neighbors' children—but for their own children, never. These, they think, are destined for higher and better things. The public tolerates and even patronizingly advocates a smattering of so-called "manual training" or "agriculture" provided it does not displace foreign languages or abstract mathematics; but the people of America who vote do not desire real vocational training in the manual trades given to their own children. Real manual education has therefore only been successful among two classes of persons, first, among the subject races and peoples such as negroes, Indians and public charges and, second, among the rich governing class whose foresight and experience in large affairs have shown to them the need of manual education for their sons. The schools for dependents and the expensive private schools, such as the wonderful country life schools of England and Switzerland, have thus far been the conspicuous successes in training in manual work.

The rise and development of agricultural education are an example of the pressure which public opinion exerts toward emasculating all attempts to give real and practical public training for manual labor. The Morrill Act passed by Congress in 1863 set aside public lands for the support of colleges teaching agriculture and the mechanic arts. Certainly the act contemplated a practical education that would fit men to become farmers and mechanics. But today no agricultural college in America pretends to give more than a smattering of farm practice despite the fact that there are more town than farm boys in the agricultural colleges. The agricultural colleges turn out excellent technologists in agriculture and its related sciences. Some of these become farmers but they learn farming elsewhere, although they study agriculture at college. From 1905 to 1915 many states created secondary agricultural schools which were planned to give very practical farm training to farm boys. Extensive systems of such schools were introduced in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Virginia, Georgia and other states. But public demand forced these schools to devote much time to the academic subjects and in turn to minimize their attention to the practical phases of farming. The schools thus either became

academic with a smattering of text-book and laboratory study of agriculture or they were forced to the wall.

THE DUTY OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Because the people of America do not want manual education for their children, the burden is the greater upon educators and other leaders of public opinion to persistently call to the attention of the public, whose ear they have, that public manual education is a necessity for the present and future good of society. We must teach and preach that "easy living" cannot be the lot of all and therefore it is unsocial and immoral for those who have not earned it. We must glorify manual labor by treating it fairly and squarely. We must educate manual labor by teaching it to labor better and more efficiently. We must hold forth manual work as a vocation which pays better in life and living than a clerkship. The farm has more of life than the ribbon-counter; the machine shop pays better wages than the bank-cage.

Public opinion can also be led and directed by means of a few privately-supported schools which are independent of public opinion. Schools like Hampton leap the entire gap in education by frankly and efficiently training American boys—not Indians, nor negroes, nor public dependents—but American boys of good stock for successful work in manual occupations. Such schools if successful become popular by the superior ability of their graduates to earn money in the trades and in turn serve as beacon lights for the slowly following public opinion and public education.

Public schools training for life—which is training for work—will make boys better farmers, better laborers, and better mechanics. By so doing they will save America.